

Safekeeping Washington's Shorelines

The Role of Shoreline Master Programs in Protecting and Restoring Puget Sound

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The state Shoreline Management Act (the Act), approved by voters in 1972, established a bill of rights for Washington's shorelines. The Act has three basic goals:

- Protect environmental resources of state shorelines.
- Promote public access and enjoyment opportunities.
- Give priorities to uses requiring shoreline location.

The Act largely relies on land use policies and regulations called Shoreline Master Programs – adopted by over 250 counties and cities with marine or freshwater shorelines – to achieve the goals of the Act.

In 2003, the Washington State Legislature set out an ambitious schedule for State-funded updates of all local Shoreline Master Programs. The update received support from a wide range of environmental, business and government interests.

As part of the local program updates, the Department of Ecology also had to update the rules that identify specific steps and standards necessary for insuring the broad environmental protection standard of the Act. The modernized standards require a much more rigorous integration of habitat and water quality protection science with land use policies and regulations adopted in the updated Shoreline Master Programs. Importantly, the Shoreline Master Program rule sets a standard of “no net loss of ecological function” for local governments to achieve through Shoreline Master Programs. In addition, stronger protection of channel migration zones and floodplains, much tougher restrictions on shoreline armoring, and other improved habitat protection are required by the rule.

What are we getting from local Shoreline Master Programs adopted under the updated rules?

- Vegetative buffers of 150 to 250 feet required of new development replacing 20 and 30 foot setback requirements of old SMP's.

- Bulkheads will no longer be a common feature of new shoreline development. Where old bulkheads are being repaired or replaced, less damaging techniques and designs will be used where feasible to improve shoreline habitat conditions.
- Habitat restoration strategies will be adopted that complement the shoreline policies and land use regulations. These strategies will incorporate and update previous restoration plans adopted by local governments and watershed groups.

How do we keep the momentum moving forward for adopting and implementing updated Shoreline Master Programs?

Top five needs regarding local program updates that ECB can help meet:

1. **Sustain state funding for local SMPs:** We have had extraordinary levels of support from the Governor and Legislature to support local grants for Puget Sound SMP updates. Nearly half the current funding is in a proviso that will need to be renewed for the 2011-13 budget in next year's Legislative session.

Directly related is the need for State funding to support effective implementation of updated SMPs, especially in cash-strapped counties. Without strong implementation, the SMP promise of better protection and restoration of shoreline habitat will be unfulfilled. This issue will also need to be addressed next session, since Puget Sound local governments will begin completing the SMP update process during the 2011-13 biennium.

2. **Engage in designing the No Net Loss framework for Puget Sound:** Ecology's rule (Guidelines) for SMP updates includes the ambitious objective of achieving no net loss of ecological function for our state's shorelines. We will need to track this objective at multiple levels. As we track the effectiveness of updated SMPs, Ecology and our local partners will be focusing on conditions in the immediate shoreline area and on measures that are relevant to local land use management decisions. The ECB and PSP need to actively engage in developing a no net loss framework for Puget Sound, to track the broader conditions of ecological health. This will be vital to ensure that the "jigsaw puzzle" pieces of Puget Sound local shoreline management are adding up to a coherent picture of effective protection and restoration.

3. **Support county and city officials in developing and adopting science-based SMPs:** Support for local SMP updates from the ECB and PSP will highlight the importance of these efforts. It will be vital that local officials, citizens and interests understand that support for SMP updates goes beyond the Department of Ecology, to include all natural resource agencies – under leadership of the PSP. Communication with elected officials

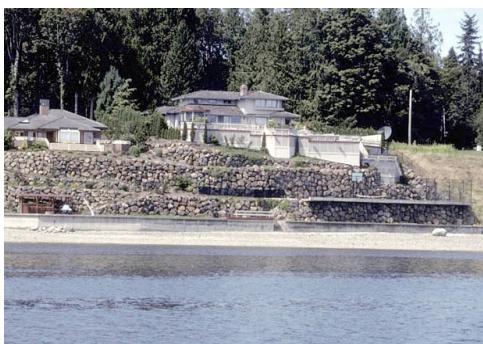
at the beginning of the SMP process and during the local adoption process will be particularly important.

4. **Support applied shoreline science projects and decision-support tools that will strengthen SMPs:** There are several data gaps and information needs that, if filled, will improve our collective ability to protect and manage Puget Sound shorelines. For example, several agencies and organizations are submitting shoreline-related projects to EPA for funding, including: collecting updated aerial photography, developing riparian buffer guidance, piloting a Puget Sound Beach Observation program, mapping feeder bluffs, developing guidance for soft-armoring, and mapping channel migration zones. The ECB and PSP can provide leadership in this area by endorsing priority projects and supporting additional investment in practical science that provides immediate results.
5. **Help create the authorizing environment for bold action to protect and restore shoreline habitat:** The ECB and PSP have a vital role in building public awareness about the actions needed to ensure a sustainable Puget Sound. Land use regulation is among the most controversial and difficult policy issues facing local governments. The ECB can help ensure broad understanding that we need to change the trajectory of our actions if we are to save Puget Sound – and that land use management is an essential element of this effort. This will be vital in giving local elected officials the political space to make the tough decisions needed to adopt effective SMPs. Public awareness and engagement is one of the most fundamental roles for the ECB and PSP.

Safekeeping Washington's shorelines means doing things a bit differently

	Future Results	Past Results
Public Access		

Buffers and Setbacks



Shoreline Armoring

